Revolution and Early America – 1775 to 1812

What is important about the time period of 1775 to 1812

Independence - American Revolution that created the United States

New form of Government (new Ideas of Liberty and Democracy)

Formation of Government

Political Development

Expansion of Territory

Social Changes

Foreign Relations and National Identity

Cultural Development

Bad feelings in the colonies were definitely increasing against the Crown. New taxes were being levied and the Colonies resented it. The French and Indian War had concluded a few year back, but now the Crown was in debt and the debt had to be paid. Parliament felt it was up to the colonies to pay for it and levied taxes against the colonies (notably the Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Tariffs of 1767 and the Tea Act of 1773). Protests broke out and the British army was called out to put them down. The British initially thought these protests were sporadic and could be put down easily. They would soon learn it was a coordinated and united Colonies seeking independence.

Key Dates

1775

Parliament refuses to negotiate with the Colonies and declares Massachusetts to be in a state of rebellion. It passes legislation to limit colonial trade to the British West Indies.

The Colonies had decided via the first Continental Congress in 1774 to boycott British goods and imports from Britain fell 97% in 1775 compared to 1774.

Both sides are now jockeying for ordnance as it appears war is imminent.

On April 18, 1775, 700 British troops were sent to confiscate militia ordnance stored at Concord.
George Washington takes command of the Continental Army laying siege to Boston in July.

The Americans fearing an attack from Quebec try to invade Quebec late in 1775 but fail.

Key Dates

1776

By March, the British are allowed to withdraw from Boston unmolested and sail to Halifax, Nova Scotia.

General Washington moves his army to New York. Fighting breaks out all over the Colonies between the Loyalist and Patriots, especially in the South.

Loyalists are barred from holding public office or executing wills for guardianship. Loyalists are forced to pay higher taxes and Congress enables states to confiscate Loyalist property to help fund the war.

July 2, Congress votes in favor of independence with 12 affirmatives and 1 abstention and issues the declaration on July 4th.

In June, British General Howe vows to take the fight to the Americans and sails to New York and lands on Staten Island July 2. General Washington has to fall back after Howe's engagement and Howe takes New York by September 15th. Patriot morale plunges.

Key Dates

December 25, Washington and the army cross the Delaware River and capture a Hessian garrison at Trenton, New Jersey capturing 900 prisoners. Victory restores morale.

1777-1778
Initially, there was a British plan to split New England via the Champaign-George-Hudson route through New York. General John Burgoyne was to start from Quebec and join up with General Howe. The reasoning was to split the Colonies and then concentrate on the southern colonies where Loyalist support was to be greater. However, Howe decides to take Philadelphia and Burgoyne is defeated at Saratoga in October 1777.

France declares war on Britain after hearing of Burgoyne's defeat and becomes an ally of the United States.

In September 1777, Howe outflanks and defeats Washington outside Philadelphia but declines to follow up and destroy his army. Lack of initiative will lead to the British defeat.

Key Dates

With France entering the war, the Continental Army is put through a new training program supervised by Baron von Stuben with the modern Prussian methods of drills.

Howe resigns and is replaced by General Clinton. *Clinton received orders to abandon Philadelphia and fortify New York following France's entry into the war. On June 18, the British departed Philadelphia, with the reinvigorated Americans in pursuit.*

1779-1780
When France entered the War, General Clinton left Philadelphia and retreated back to New York to consolidate his forces.

The British and French jockey for positions in the West but both meet with limited success. The Native Americans raid the frontier settlements in the West, but the Americans do not have the manpower to fight on two fronts. The West settles into a stalemate although the Indians continue to raid the settlements.

Key Dates

Southern Campaign

Britain was convinced Loyalists support was much greater in the South. Turning their attention to Savannah, Georgia, they hope to inspire an uprising. It also kept the Royal Navy closer to the Caribbean in case they were needed there against the Franco-Spanish fleets

After an early attempt in 1778, by December the British land an New York expeditionary force and capture Savannah.

The southern Franco-American army fails to retake Savannah in October 1778 and in 1780, Clinton moves to capture Charleston, SC effectively destroying the southern Continental Army capturing over 5000 men.

Patriot militias suppress Loyalist recruitments by winning a series of battles in the Carolinas.

Key Dates

Although Horatio Gates is appointed by Congress to lead the campaign in the south, he is defeated at Camden, SC by Cornwallis and sets the stage for Cornwallis to invade North Carolina. Patriot militia continues to fight Cornwallis and he retreats back to South Carolina. Gates is replaced by Nathanael Greene and sends General Daniel Morgan south to recruit additional troops. Morgan defeats Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Banastre Tarleton at Cowpens destroying the cream of British units. Cornwallis, in his haste to chase Greene's army, discards his supply trains and supplies. Cornwallis thinks he can forage for support and supplies off the Loyalist in the area. Greene avoids direct conflict with Cornwallis and wears Cornwallis's army down through attrition.

March 1781, Greene's army has grown large enough to directly assault Cornwallis. They meet at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. Although Guilford Courthouse is a tactical win for Cornwallis, he suffers a greater number of casualties that cannot be replaced. Cornwallis retires to Wilmington for reinforcements. The Patriots reclaim the interior of the Carolinas and Georgia. Greene's army goes on to reclaim the South with the British bottled up at Charleston and Savannah.

Key Dates

Yorktown and the British Defeat

Cornwallis believed he could split the Colonies in two because he found most of the Continental armies supplies were being funneled through Virginia. By cutting off Greene's supplies, he thought the South might collapse.

General Clinton opposed the plan favoring a response further up in the Chesapeake Bay. Lord Germain (in Britain) approved Cornwallis's plan but failed to notify Clinton of his decision even though Clinton was his superior officer. Cornwallis moved his army to Virginia without telling Clinton.

Cornwallis establishes fortifications at Yorktown and awaits the Royal Navy. The French Navy engages and defeats the British squadron in the Chesapeake Bay effectively cutting off Cornwallis hopes for supplies.

Cornwallis made no attempt to break out and engage the Franco-American army before it had established siege works, expecting that reinforcements would arrive from New York,[406] and the Franco-American army laid siege to Yorktown on September 28.[407] Cornwallis continued to think that relief was imminent from Clinton, and he abandoned his outer defenses which were immediately occupied by American troops—serving to hasten his subsequent defeat.[408] The British then failed in an attempt to break out of the siege across the river at Gloucester Point when a storm hit.[409] Cornwallis and his subordinates were under increasing bombardment and facing dwindling supplies; they agreed that their situation was untenable and negotiated a surrender on October 17, 1781,[410] and 7,685 soldiers became prisoners of the Americans.[411] The same day as the surrender, 6,000 troops under Clinton had departed New York, sailing to relieve Yorktown.[412][413] (Wikipedia)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolutionary_War

Europe and Peace Treaty

Meanwhile, in London, things are not well. Riots ensue because of the decision to allow Irish Catholics to join the British Army. The September news of Yorktown's surrender only adds to British Prime Minister North's problems. Resistance is growing in Parliament to end the war. A motion December 12th to end the war is defeated by only one vote. A motion on February 27th, 1782 passes to end the war by 19 votes. PM North resigns and his ministry collapses. The Rockingham Whigs assume power and negotiations begin for the cessation of hostilities. Britain is fighting a war on multiple fronts (India, Gibraltar, and the Caribbean). Things are not going well for the French and Spanish either, but Britain recognizes those fortunes could turn on any given situation.

Preliminary peace articles were signed in Paris on 30 November 1782, while preliminaries between Britain, Spain, France, and the Netherlands continued until September 1783. The United States Congress of the Confederation ratified the Treaty of Paris on January 14, 1784. Copies were sent back to Europe for ratification by the other parties involved, the first reaching France in March 1784. British ratification occurred on April 9, 1784, and the ratified versions were exchanged in Paris on May 12, 1784.[515] ***The war formally concluded on September 3, 1783.***[11] ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Revolution***

Early America 1783-1800

When the war was finally over in 1783, the founding fathers struggled to establish a fledgling government. They created the Constitution in 1788. The first ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights quickly followed, the new national government under President George Washington began operation in 1789. The growth of the United States dramatically expanded with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, which began westward expansion in earnest. https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ah-formativeyears/

Many of the tribes in the Northwest Territories had sided with the British and the Treaty of Paris ceded a lot of this territory to the United States. Unfortunately, the tribes had not been included during the treaty negotiations and resisted any incursion into the territory.

The tribes had formed the Western Indian Confederacy and were supplied by Britain to contain US settlement in the area. Previous victories in 1790 and 1791 by the tribes forced President Washington to deal with the problem.

General Wayne set out to create and train a regular professional military force. He created regular basic training and established a series of forts on his way to Ohio that were supplied and manned by the troops.

On August 20, 1794, Wayne mounted an assault on the Indian confederacy at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, in modern Maumee, Ohio (just south of present-day Toledo), which was a decisive victory for the U.S. forces, ending the war. (Wikipedia)

General Wayne negotiates the Treaty of Greenville ceding extensive territory including what will become the state of Ohio. He proceeds to build a fort at a trading post occupied by the French in 1704 called Fort Miami. It will later be renamed Fort Wayne (Indiana) in his honor!

Presidents Washington, Adams, and Jefferson
George Washington, the hero of the War for Independence, becomes the first President in 1789 by unanimous vote of the Electoral College. He, along with Hamilton and others, establish a strong federal government under the new Constitution.

Washington refuses a third term and John Adams becomes President defeating Thomas Jefferson in 1796.

The possibility of war with France propels Adams to sign the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798. Adams builds up the army and navy expecting to go to war but successfully negotiates a peace treaty with France. It creates discord within his own party and he only serves one term. He is known as the “father of the American Navy”.

Adams is defeated by Thomas Jefferson for the Presidency in 1800 and becomes the third American president. His major achievement is the purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803. He has a deep distrust of big government and judges and tries to weaken the judiciary. *However, he met his match in John Marshall, a Federalist from Virginia. Although the Constitution specified a Supreme Court, its functions were vague until Marshall, the Chief Justice (1801–35), defined them, especially the power to overturn acts of Congress or states that violated the Constitution, first enunciated in 1803 in Marbury v. Madison.[69] (Wikipedia)*

Slavery

During the first two decades after the Revolutionary War, there were dramatic changes in the status of slavery among the states and an increase in the number of freed blacks. Inspired by revolutionary ideals of the equality of men and influenced by their lesser economic reliance on slavery, northern states abolished slavery.

States of the Upper South made manumission easier, resulting in an increase in the proportion of free blacks in the Upper South (as a percentage of the total non-white population) from less than one percent in 1792 to more than 10 percent by 1810. By that date, a total of 13.5 percent of all blacks in the United States were free.[66] After that date, with the demand for slaves on the rise because of the Deep South's expanding cotton cultivation, the number of manumissions declined sharply; and an internal U.S. slave trade became an important source of wealth for many planters and traders.

In 1807, President James Madison severed the U.S.A.'s involvement with the Atlantic slave trade. (Wikipedia)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_Prohibiting_Importation_of_Slaves

Where are our ancestors found?

Unlike the more recent conflicts beginning with the Civil War, the fallen in battle were usually buried where they fell.

But all is not lost!

Patriot Revolutionary Cemeteries

There's no single, official count of "Revolutionary cemeteries" as a distinct category, but the VA maintains 155 national cemeteries and 34 related soldiers' lots, and the Army maintains two national cemeteries, with the National Park Service managing 14 national cemeteries.

However, FamilySearch has links to resources. https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Revolutionary_War_Cemetery_Records

Resources

Revolutionary War Records

Fold3 http://www.fold3.com

Military Indexes http://militaryindexes.com/revolutionarywar/

Cyndi's List https://www.cyndislist.com/us/

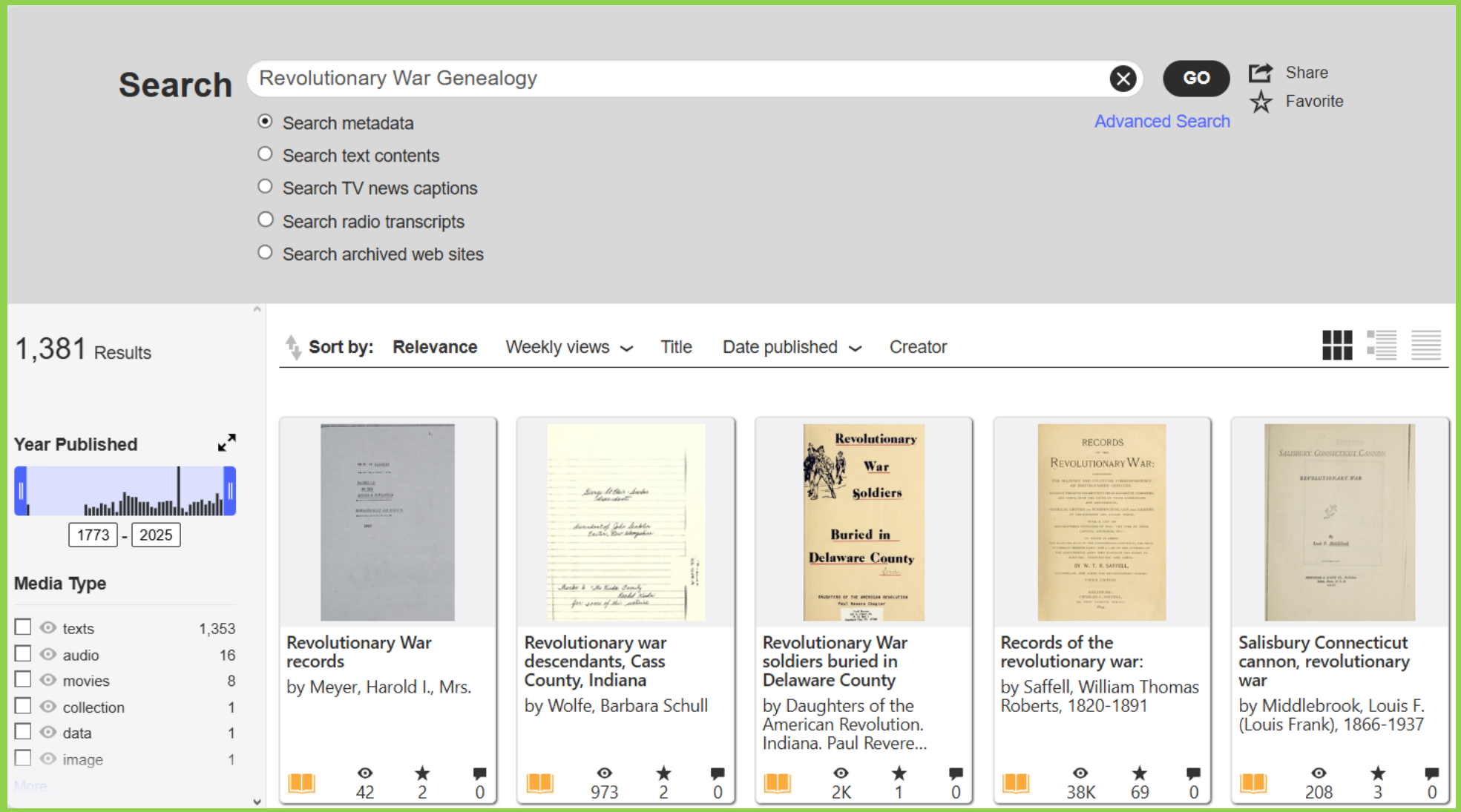
Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters http://revwarapps.org/

American Revolution http://www.americanrevolution.org/pension.php

Find My Past https://www.findmypast.com/articles/world-records/full-list-of-united-states-records/military-service-and-conflict/united-states-revolutionary-war-pensions

Ancestry.com (Search the Card Catalog for Revolutionary War)

Resources



Archive.org

https://archive.org/search?query=Revolutionary+War+Genealogy

Loyalists and British Army

United Kingdom – American Revolution http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/american-revolution/

United Kingdom – British Army muster rolls 1730-1898 http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-army-muster-rolls-pay-lists-1730-1898/

The On-Line Institute of Advanced Loyalist Studies http://www.royalprovincial.com/military/musters/musters.htm

Ancestry.com (Search Card Catalog Example: "Canada Revolutionary War"

https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/catalog/?keyword=canada%20revolutionary%20war

Canadian Archives (Example: "Revolutionary War")

https://recherche-collection-search.baclac.gc.ca/eng/home/Result?q=Revolutionary%20War

Battlefield Burials:

•**British Army Regulations:** British Army regulations called for battlefield burial of their dead.

•**Examples:**

- **Mount Independence State Historic Site in Orwell, Vermont:** Researchers have found burial sites that likely contain the remains of Americans, British, Germans, Canadians, and Native Americans.
- **Battle of Germantown (1777):** An unidentified British soldier, believed to have died on the spot, was found buried there.
- **Brandywine Battlefield:** A common grave holds the remains of both British and American soldiers who fell during the battle.
- **Camden, South Carolina:** Remains of 14 Revolutionary War soldiers, including British, were unearthed from the Battle of Camden grounds.
- **Fiske Hill:** Local residents reported a large tree stump marking the grave of British Soldiers, although the exact location is now lost.
- **The Soldiers' Grave Near The Josiah Nelson Farm:** British soldiers killed on April 19, 1775 are buried atop this small knoll near the Josiah Nelson farm ruins.